



<b>Name of Property:</b>	Arch Street Friends Meeting House
<b>City, State:</b>	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
<b>Significant Dates:</b>	1803-1954
<b>NHL Criteria:</b>	1 and 4, Exception 1
<b>NHL Theme:</b>	II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements 4. Community and Neighborhood III. Expressing Cultural Values 2. Reform Movements III. Expressing Cultural Values 1. Education and Intellectual Currents IV. Shaping the Political Landscape 1. Parties, Protests, and Movements
<b>Previous Recognition:</b>	1971 National Register of Historic Places 1974, 2002 Historic American Buildings Survey, PA-1388
<b>National Historic Context:</b>	Special Study

**NHL Significance:**

- The Arch Street Friends Meeting House has been the site of the annual meeting sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (PYM) continuously since 1805. It is the largest Quaker meeting house in the United States and the only one of its complex functionality. In the context of the development of the American Friends meeting house, Arch Street is extremely innovative while at the same time manifesting long-held Quaker beliefs and traditions. The size and the sophistication of the Arch Street Friends Meeting House reflect its unique status.
- Erected between 1803 and 1811, the meeting house is the only known extant work of Owen Biddle (1774-1806), an accomplished Quaker master builder/carpenter and author



of *The Young Carpenter's Assistant; A System of Architecture Adapted to the Style of Building in the United States* (1805), one of the earliest books on architecture written in America.

- Biddle's design for the meeting house is also architecturally significant as an especially elegant embodiment of the Friends' tenet of "plainness" and Plain-style architectural expression.
- As the home of the PYM of the Religious Society of Friends, the Arch Street Meeting House is associated with Liberty of Conscience, an ideal fundamental to Quaker tenets that, with its emphasis on freedom and equality, had significant influence on such developments as the founding of the United States and as a motivator in the struggle for social justice and for charitable outreach.
- There are few significant political or social reform movements for which Friends of the PYM have not played a major role, including some of the earliest and most ardent defenses of abolition and the betterment of freedmen, innovative prison reform, and women's rights.
- The PYM established the American Friends Service Committee, which undertook relief and reconstruction projects to aid civilian victims of the war in Europe, and provided for the first time an organized alternative to military service for American conscientious objectors. The committee was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947.

**Integrity:**

- Arch Street Friends Meeting House retains a remarkably high level of integrity, especially the north front and east and west side façades.
- On the interior, the west meeting room remains virtually unchanged, including all the fixtures and furnishings used for Quaker worship and business meetings.

**Owner of Property:** The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends

**Acreage of Property:** 2.21 acres

**Origins of Nomination:** The National Historic Landmark Working Group of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting produced and submitted the nomination with the assistance of Catherine C. Lavoie from the Historic American Buildings Survey.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

- Designation as an NHL will bring recognition to and assist in the interpretation of the history of the PYM of the Religious Society of Friends and its contributions to American civil rights, social outreach, and political culture.
- Designation as an NHL will bring recognition to Owen Biddle, an important American builder of the Federal period and early pattern book author.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known.

**Landmarks Committee Comments:** Mr. James asked whether 1954 would make a more appropriate terminal date for the period of significance since it marks the reconciliation of the Friends at the Arch Street Friends Meeting House. The preparer of the nomination, Catherine Lavoie, noted that the program would consider extending the ending date of the period of significance to 1954.

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:** Designation. Dr. Allan moved, Dr. Stevens seconded; unanimous approval.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (comments received as of 11/01/10):**

John Andrew Gallery, Executive Director, Preservation Alliance, Philadelphia

Andrea L. MacDonald, Chief, Division of Historic Services, Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

Roger W. Moss, Ph.D., Director Emeritus, The Athenæum of Philadelphia

Christina Thompson, Director, The Carpenter's Company of the City and County of Philadelphia

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D., Executive Director, Philadelphia Historical Commission (on behalf of City of Philadelphia)

A. Robert Jaeger, Executive Director, Partners for Sacred Places, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Arthur M. Larrabee, General Secretary, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (owners)

**Advisory Board Recommendation:**